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## The *Life of Job*: Bible Translation, Poem or Play?\*

CATHY HUME

*The Life of Job* is an English biblical poem from the middle of the fifteenth century: a time when biblical poetry was not generally being written.<sup>1</sup> It is a short poem, in rhyme royal stanzas, composed in aureate language that reads like an imitation of Lydgate. The poem cuts all the central material from the canonical Book of Job, removing all questioning about divine justice and the human condition. This leaves a kind of saint's life, with Job as a man of straightforwardly exemplary patience who is tested, rewarded and eventually dies. This hagiographical presentation, along with the incorporation of legendary material and a few episodes of the poet's own invention, fits fairly well into the older, thirteenth- and fourteenth-century tradition of biblical poems, works that 'weave with ease and without self-consciousness in and out of the volume we know ... as the Bible.'<sup>2</sup> But on the other hand, the poem is accompanied

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1 See James Morey, *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Biblical Literature* (Urbana, 2000), a comprehensive catalogue of biblical literature in Middle English, where the overwhelming majority of the poems date from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

2 David Lawton, 'Englishing the Bible, 1066–1549', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge, 1999), 454–82 (479).

by a highly unusual set of glosses from the Vulgate, which clearly demonstrate exactly how each stanza corresponds to the Bible, making absolutely explicit the poem's status as a close translation of its chosen biblical passages.

The poem appears uniquely in San Marino, CA, Huntington Library MS HM 140, without title, author, or any kind of authorizing note.<sup>3</sup> William McClellan has persuasively argued that the manuscript is made up of three originally separate fifteenth-century paper booklets.<sup>4</sup> The first part (fols. 1r–92v), written in multiple hands, opens with Lydgate's *Life of Saint Alban and Saint Amphibal*, followed by a text of the *Clerk's Tale* without an opening prologue and with a truncated ending; it continues with shorter poems by Chaucer and Lydgate and an incomplete text of Lydgate's *Testamentum*. The second part (fols 93r–124v), written in a new hand, contains only the *Life of Job* (fols 93v–96v), and has numerous names and pen trials on the remaining blank pages. The third part (fols 125r–170v), written in further new hands, opens with *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye* and an incomplete, Latin *Apollonius of Tyre*, which is followed by several prayers and treatises, including a piece of advice to apprentices; as Seth Lerer has commented, it has the feel of a commonplace book.<sup>5</sup> The paper of the first two booklets can perhaps be dated to the 1470s, and the poem might date from that decade or from any time in the preceding thirty years.<sup>6</sup> The manuscript was bound together by 1521, when it was in the possession of William Marshall, a London armourer; William Turner, who was perhaps Master of the Robes for Henry VII, may have owned it earlier in the sixteenth century: both names appear in the second and third booklets.<sup>7</sup> It has been suggested that the first booklet was the book bequeathed by Sir Thomas

3 For a full description, see C. W. Dutschke, *Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Huntington Library*, 2 vols (San Marino, 1989), 1: 185–90.

4 William McClellan, 'The Transcription of the "Clerk's Tale" in MS HM 140: Interpreting Textual Effects', *Studies in Bibliography* 47 (1994), 89–103 (90). McClellan's interpretation is a departure from the collation proposed by Dutschke (1: 189), who saw the manuscript as falling into two parts, with the *Life of Job* located in the first part.

5 Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton, 1993), 101.

6 On the watermarks, see Dutschke, 1: 189. She identifies the watermarks of the third booklet as slightly earlier.

7 John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, 8 vols (Chicago, 1940), 1: 435–8; Dutschke, 190.

Chaworth, a Nottinghamshire gentleman, in 1458/9, but the evidence for this is slight, and the whole manuscript is more strongly associated with London.<sup>8</sup> It bears a certain resemblance to other roughly contemporary London anthologies such as Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R. 3. 21.<sup>9</sup>

Fifteenth-century religious writing in English has received a great deal of scholarly attention since Nicholas Watson's 1995 article, which provocatively argued that Archbishop Arundel's 1408–9 Constitutions, traditionally seen as directed at banning the Wycliffite Bible, actually achieved a wholesale transformation of religious literary culture. He argued that this change involved a stifling of the writing of vernacular theology, limited circulation of any texts that were written, and a general mood of anxiety and self-censorship.<sup>10</sup> More recent scholarship has denied that the Constitutions were as influential as Watson suggested, emphasizing the genres that did flourish in the fifteenth century, including saints' lives and drama, and identifying other causes apart from Arundel's Constitutions for the cultural change.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, a cultural change does seem to have taken place, affecting biblical poetry among other genres. The biblical literature that was written in the fifteenth century, such as Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, the *Mirour of Men's Salvacioun* and Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady*, often existed at a remove from the biblical text, either a loose meditation upon it, a translation of an intermediary text, or both.<sup>12</sup> The

8 On Chaworth, see Manly and Rickert, 1: 609–10, and Thorlac Turville-Petre, 'Some Medieval English Manuscripts in the North-East Midlands', in *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth-Century England: The Literary Implications of Manuscript Study*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge, 1983), 125–41 (132).

9 See Sheila Lindenbaum's discussion of manuscripts owned by London citizens in the second half of the fifteenth century in 'London Texts and Literate Practice', in *Cambridge History*, ed. Wallace, 284–309 (307–8).

10 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum* 70 (1995), 822–64.

11 See the whole of *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh (Turnhout, 2011) for various challenges to and developments upon Watson's article, and Watson's 'Afterword: A Clerke Schulde Have it of Kinde for to Kepe Counsell', 563–89, where he accepts some changes to his original model but reasserts his observation of a major cultural shift and ongoing pervasive anxiety about what could be written.

12 See David Lawton, 'The Bible', in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English, Volume 1: To 1550*, ed. Roger Ellis (Oxford, 2008), 193–233, on this shift. For the individual poems, see *The Mirour of Mans Saluacioun: A Middle English*

*Life of Job* is an outlier here. It shares the aureate language that seems to have functioned as a marker of orthodoxy in Lydgate's biblically inspired writings and contemporary saints' lives.<sup>13</sup> And, as I will go on to argue, it is a cautious text that tightly controls meaning. But its close relationship with the Bible, which is carefully demonstrated through its marginal glosses, makes it unlike the texts I mentioned above. In fact, the glosses make it unusual altogether, because, as Alastair Minnis has shown, there are surprisingly few glosses on fifteenth-century English texts.<sup>14</sup>

*The Life of Job* has not been reconsidered as part of this new wave of scholarly attention to fifteenth-century religious writing. It has been edited twice: once in 1911 by Henry Noble MacCracken and, in a 1963 Festschrift, by G. N. Garmonsway and R. R. Raymo, but it has not received much attention since.<sup>15</sup> Seth Lerer and Lynn Staley both discussed the poem in the 1990s, but their main interests were in the longer poems by Chaucer and Lydgate earlier in MS HM 140, and in how *The Life of Job* might contribute to the manuscript's thematic unity: Lerer even went so far as to suggest that the *Life* was 'perhaps deliberately constructed to reflect the interests of the compilation's other poems'.<sup>16</sup> Partly because of the manuscript history I described briefly above, but also because of the nature of the poem's content, I find this account of the poem's function unconvincing. Its editors had their own ideas: MacCracken confidently asserted – although there is no trace of this in the *ordinatio* of HM 140 – that originally 'its stanzas were intended to describe scenes painted

*translation of Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, ed. Avril Henry (Aldershot, 1986); Nicholas Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (New York, 1992); and Robert J. Meyer-Lee, 'The Emergence of the Literary in John Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 109: 3 (2010), 322–48, and the editions cited there.

13 Meyer-Lee, 'Emergence of the Literary'. See also Vincent Gillespie, 'Chichele's Church: Vernacular Theology in England After Thomas Arundel', in *After Arundel*, ed. Gillespie and Ghosh, 3–42, 36 and note 79.

14 A. J. Minnis, 'Absent Glosses: A Crisis of Vernacular Commentary in Late-Medieval England?', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 20 (2003), 1–17.

15 'A Middle English Metrical *Life of Job*', ed. G. N. Garmonsway and R. R. Raymo, in *Early English and Norse Studies presented to Hugh Smith in honour of his sixtieth birthday*, ed. Arthur Brown and Peter Foote (London, 1963), 77–98 (77); Henry Noble MacCracken, 'Lydgatiana I: The *Life of Holy Job*', *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 126 (1911), 365–70 (366).

16 Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers*, 112; Staley, 'Huntington 140: Chaucer, Lydgate and the Politics of Retelling', in *Retelling Tales: Essays in Honor of Russell Peck*, ed. Thomas Hahn and Alan Lupack (Cambridge, 1997), 293–320.

in miniature on some fine MS. of vellum, for some well-born person's moral edification.<sup>17</sup> Garmonsway and Raymo tentatively agreed; they also suggested that it was 'possibly a mumming poem' but then immediately withdrew the suggestion.<sup>18</sup>

In what follows I will offer a new account of the distinctive nature of the *Life of Job* and its original function. I will show how it both participates in a lively late medieval tradition of Job, and makes its own unique additions – most interestingly, a moment where God rebukes Job for his unkindness to his wife. I will place the poem within its late fifteenth-century context and seek to understand how this text combines 'free poetic handling' and close biblical translation, traditions that have seemed to exist in opposition elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> I will consider how a poetic adaptation of the Book of Job might have had a status distinct from that of a prose Gospel translation; I will explore exactly how the glosses might contribute to that status; and, notwithstanding Garmonsway and Raymo's reservations, I will propose that the *Life of Job* was written for performance as a kind of play.

## I

There was a lively late medieval Job tradition, and the distinctiveness of the *Life of Job* becomes clear when we read it as part of that tradition. The biblical Book of Job sets out, in Lawrence Besserman's words, to 'probe divine justice' and 'question traditional wisdom'; its final significance is hard to pin down.<sup>20</sup> This is about as far as it is possible to get from the 'mylke of lyzte doctryne' that Nicholas Love professed to think suitable for 'symple' lay readers in 1410, and much closer to what he considered the unsuitable 'sadde mete of grete clargye & of hye contemplacion' – the kinds of controversial theological subjects whose discussion had been regulated by Arundel's Constitutions.<sup>21</sup> But in fact, Job's story would

17 MacCracken, 'Life of Holy Job', 365.

18 Garmonsway and Raymo, 'Metrical Life', 78.

19 The *Life of Job* is placed in the category of 'free poetic handling' in one of the few other recent critical references to it: Lawton, 'Englishing the Bible', 477.

20 Lawrence L. Besserman, *The Legend of Job in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), 7.

21 Love, *Mirror*, xlv and 10. On the likelihood that Love's actual audience and envisaged mode of reading is rather different from the 'symple' folk invoked here, see Ryan Perry, "'Thynk on God, as we doon, men that swynke': The Cultural

have been very familiar to lay worshippers in the fifteenth century. Their familiarity would have come primarily from the Office of the Dead, whose liturgy included the Nine Lessons from Job, or *Dirige*, which by this period was both read at funerals and included in the daily devotions set out in books of hours.<sup>22</sup> English lyrical poems were written based on that liturgy, of which more later.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Job was venerated as a saint. His shrine was visited by travellers in the East, as mentioned in *Mandeville's Travels* and Heywood's early sixteenth-century play *Four PP*, and he was regarded as the patron saint of both musicians, and sufferers from syphilis and the plague.<sup>24</sup> He is frequently portrayed in the visual arts and is the subject of a long mid-fifteenth-century French play, *La Pacionce de Job*.<sup>25</sup> He even appeared at the Cornhill Conduit as part of the Royal Entry welcoming Katherine of Aragon to London in 1501/2, along with Raphael, Alfonso and Boethius.<sup>26</sup> As Besserman shows, by the end of the Middle Ages Job's popular reputation was as a patient sufferer, faithful in his belief in God's eventual mercy.

The *Life of Job* is in tune with this. The poet presents Job as a straightforwardly saintly figure, and this is part of a set of changes to his Vulgate source that help him to control the meaning of his narrative, and present a clear moral universe. Excising all Job's questioning speeches and all the philosophical debate is the most significant change, leaving a narrative where God allows the devil to tempt Job through a series of trials, then rewards him at the end. As Garmonsway and Raymo showed, there are precedents dating back to the Greek *Testament of Job* for this more narrative-centred approach, which must have influenced the poet.<sup>27</sup> The

Locations of *Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord* and the Middle English Pseudo-Bonaventuran Tradition,' *Speculum* 86 (2011), 419–54 (441, 448–52).

22 Besserman, *Legend of Job*, 56–64; see also Denis Renevey, 'Looking for a Context: Rolle, Anchoritic Culture, and the Office of the Dead', in *Medieval Texts in Context*, ed. Graham D. Caie and Denis Renevey (London, 2008), 192–210.

23 Edited and discussed in *Moral Love Songs and Laments*, ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, 1998), 289–359.

24 Besserman, *Legend of Job*, 64–5; *The Egerton Version of Mandeville's Travels*, ed. M. C. Seymour, EETS o.s. 336 (Oxford, 2010), 56; 'The Four PP', in *Plays of John Heywood*, ed. Richard Axton and Peter Happé (Cambridge, 1991), line 34.

25 *La Pacionce de Job: mystère anonyme du XVe siècle*, ed. Albert Meiller (Paris, 1971).

26 *Records of Early English Drama: Civic London to 1588*, ed. Anne Lancashire, 3 vols (Cambridge, 2015), 2: 891.

27 Garmonsway and Raymo, 79–83. For *The Testament of Job* (written around the first century BCE or CE), see R. P. Spittler's translation in *The Old Testament*

smaller changes are also significant. The meaning, value and cause of almost everything and everyone in the poem is specified for us through the constant addition of words and short phrases. Job is 'rightfull' (2), 'blessid' (141, 162) and 'holy' (9, 15, 24), whereas Satan is motivated by 'envy' (29), 'tortuose' (43), and 'irefull' (46). Everything that happens before, during and after Satan's temptation of Job happens according to God's will: Job is rich through God's 'habundant goodness' (1) and his life lasts according to 'Goddess plesaunce' (173). The poem does not leave any space to question divine benevolence: we are told that God acts out of 'myght and magnificence' (81) and 'godenesse' (159). The mystery of why God allows Job to suffer, and whether this can truly be considered benevolent, is not merely left unexplored: by piling on the adjectives in this way the poet discourages us from seeing any moral complexity. The effect is of an orthodoxy so well controlled that the poetry has little room to breathe.

The poet makes several additions to the biblical text that incorporate conventional interpretations of the Book of Job. I have been able to trace several of these back to Gregory's *Moralia in Job*, which, in excerpted form, formed the entirety of the Ordinary Gloss on Job.<sup>28</sup> So, for example, Job's concern that feasts are often accompanied by 'voluptuose fraylte and ydell loquacite' (23) has its source in Gregory's statements that 'paene semper enim epulas comitatur voluptas' and 'loquacitas sequitur' (feasts are almost always accompanied by voluptuousness and loquaciousness: Book 1, para 8).<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Job says:

'Nakyd owte of the wombe of my moder I entrid,  
Nakyd unto the erthe I shall be revertid' (74–5)

*Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols (New York, 1983), 1: 829–68. The means by which the *Testament* tradition reached the poet is unclear: Garmonsway and Raymo, 88.

28 Besserman, *Legend of Job*, 56. Mary Dove notes that the Wycliffite Bible often preferred glosses by Lyra, with two manuscripts, London, British Library Cotton Claudius MS E II and Royal MS I. C. IX, using glosses from Lyra throughout the Book of Job: *The First English Bible: the Text and Context of the Wycliffite Versions* (Cambridge, 2007), 163–9.

29 All references are to Gregorius Magnus, *Moralia in Job*, ed. Marcus Adriaen, CCSL 143, 3 vols (Turnhout, 1979). Translations are taken, sometimes slightly adapted, from Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, trans. J. Bliss, 3 vols (Oxford, 1850).



This draws on Gregory's equation of the earth with the womb in Book 2, para 17 of the *Moralia*: 'quia uero omnes nos terra genuit, hanc non immerito matrem uocamus.' ('As the earth has produced all of us, we not unjustly call her our mother'.)<sup>30</sup> The triumphant image towards the end of the poem also comes from Gregory:

Lyke as the filth from fyne gold tryed ys by fyre,  
So nowe Iob is tryed from all corrupcion. (134–5)

This is a development of Job 23.10, which mentions God trying Job like gold in fire, but it tellingly includes Gregory's emphasis on filth (*sordes*) and purification: 'quasi aurum ergo quod per ignem transit probatur anima iustorum quibus exustione tribulationis et subtrahuntur uitia et merita augentur' ('so like gold that passeth through the fire the souls of the righteous are tried, which by the burning of tribulation though and through, both have their defects removed, and their good points increased': Book 16, para 32). Finally, one of the poem's Latin marginal glosses comes from Gregory. Next to lines 141–7, a stanza about Job thanking God after his restoration, but showing no pride, appears the gloss: 'De nullo dona dei superbio qui sumptus ex pulvere in pulverem me reddire cognosco.' This is an abbreviation of Gregory's 'De nullo auctoris mei dona superbio, quia sumptus ex puluere, per illatae mortis sententiam ad pulverem me redire cognosco' ('I do not boast myself of any gift of my Creator, because, having been taken from the dust, I know that I return to dust by the sentence of death which has been inflicted on me': Book 35, para 6).

The medieval discourse of patience is a broader influence on the poem. Job's exemplary patience is never explicitly mentioned in the Book of Job (though 'sufferentiam Job', translated in the Wycliffite Bible as 'suffring, ethir pacience' is mentioned in James 5.11).<sup>31</sup> However, the poem's Job is explicitly 'patient' (71); his trials are aimed at bringing him

30 It may also be informed by the image of earth as mother in Maximianus' first *Elegy*, which lies behind the old man knocking on the earth in Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* (VI, 729–38). See *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert M. Correale with Mary Hamel, 2 vols (Cambridge, 2002), 1: 312–19.

31 *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments, with the Apocryphal Books, in the earliest English versions made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his followers*, ed. Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden, 4 vols (Oxford, 1850). Dove also cites a gloss in the Wycliffite Bible on Jeremiah 14.20, which mentions 'seint Joob, ensaumpler of pacience': *First English Bible*, 163. I

'owte of his pacience' (44), and by the end he overcomes his temptation 'with pacience' (137); the word comes up several more times, to drive the exemplary message home. Ralph Hanna has shown that the medieval understanding of patience was highly determined, and its commonplaces were well known. Christian patience involved not only suffering without complaint – an older, Stoic idea – but also an active trust in God. Trials were often described as 'scourges', and their surest remedy was prayer.<sup>32</sup> In the *Life* Job is given frequent prayers to God (55, 73, 77) and his trials are described as 'the scerge of sorowe' (71) – both additions to the Vulgate version. When Job 'setith at nought' 'the losse of his godes' (53), another detail that does not appear in the Bible, he shows his equanimity and his resistance to being affected by a loss of possessions. All these changes help to make Job an easily legible figure of exemplary patience.

The poet is slightly more distinctive in connecting this philosophy of patience with nature. At the start of the poem he explains approvingly that Job's sons enjoyed feasting together with one another and their sisters 'in augmentacion of perfite love naturall' (14), expressing a positive value for nature and natural affection that appears to have been a late medieval preaching commonplace.<sup>33</sup> Then, when Job's children are killed, Job says: 'God gave, God takyth. Yt is His naturall' (68). At the end of the poem Job's death is introduced with the comment 'Lo! thus by processe naturall every thyng draweth to ende' (176). In contrast, Job refuses treatment from the physicians' 'crafte artificiall' (100) because he wishes to 'remytte' his 'cure' to God (105). The point, in all three cases, is to persuade us of the necessary virtue of patient endurance of illness and death since they are natural phenomena under God's control.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of narrative elements, there are three main additions to the Vulgate story. The leeches and physicians who come to visit Job when

doubt there is anything specifically Wycliffite in this formulation: thinking of Job as patient appears to be conventional.

32 Ralph Hanna III, 'Some Commonplaces of Late Medieval Patience Discussions: An Introduction', in *The Triumph of Patience*, ed. Gerald J. Schiffhorst (Orlando, 1978), 65–87.

33 See Hugh White, *Nature, Sex and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition* (Oxford, 2000), who cites examples from sermons, *The Pricke of Conscience* and *Dives and Pauper*, 48–55.

34 On the conventional medieval view that miraculous cures, conceptualized as natural, are superior to human medicine, see Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford, 2005), 71 and 73. Thanks to Alaric Hall for this reference.

he is on the dunghill can be traced back to the *Testament of Job*.<sup>35</sup> Two stanzas later, some minstrels come to play, and Job pays them in scabs that turn to gold in their hands. As Besserman and Garmonsway and Raymo show, minstrels had attached themselves to Job's story by the fifteenth century. In two images reproduced by Besserman Job appears to be paying them with scabs.<sup>36</sup> The poet adds the tag 'as sayth the story' to this stanza (line 124), marking it out as being without scriptural authority – a point I will return to. These first two additions appear, then, to be part of the popular medieval Job story tradition.

The third change is different. The poet adds an episode to the narrative that has no known source or parallel in the medieval tradition, where God appears to Job, upbraids him for his mistreatment of his wife, and has Job repent and ask forgiveness. It is worth quoting the stanza in full:

Here the blessid Lorde of hevyn, God omnipotent,  
Unto his holy man Iob than He apperid,  
And sore rebuked hym for that intende  
That he to-fore tym had his wyfe cursed,  
For whiche of God mercy than mercy he axid  
And of forgevenesse of grete offence  
Of his hasty spekyng and wilfull insolence. (113–19)

Garmonsway and Raymo remark on the originality of this episode, but their explanation seems less than convincing: 'the poet wishes to stress Job's customary supreme patience under provocation ... by this momentary departure from it'.<sup>37</sup> This does not seem particularly logical.

35 As indicated above, the exact form in which a fifteenth-century writer might have known the *Testament* is unclear: Spittler asserts that the *Testament* was 'virtually unnoticed till modern times' ('Testament', 836); Garmonsway and Raymo discuss the connections at some length but simply suggest that these elements in the *Life* are 'borrowed either from the Testament or its derivatives' (80).

36 The images come from an altarpiece by the Meister der Barbara-legende in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne (also reproduced by Garmonsway and Raymo), and a manuscript of Pierre de Nesson's *Neuf leçons de Job*: see Besserman, *Legend of Job*, 124–5. Garmonsway and Raymo present another image of minstrels from a French book of hours, between 84 and 85.

37 Garmonsway and Raymo, 84. Besserman takes the same line: *Legend of Job*, 92.

Moreover, if we return to the moment that provokes God's rebuke, the poet does not portray Job's original behaviour very differently from the Vulgate account:

Syttynge on the dongehill, this gode and blessid man  
 Cam his wyf and to hym seid, 'Yet in thi simplicitie  
 Thou here arte permanent? Corse thi God and dye than!  
 Thou beste, what is thi pacience nowe in thyn adversite?  
 This shalt thou never recover, trust verely me.'  
 Iob said, 'Folysshe woman, I counsell the, be styll,  
 For he that takyth gode thyng sumtyme must take ill.' (92–8)

In the Vulgate Job 2.9–10, Job's wife says: 'adhuc tu permanes in simplicitate tua? Benedic Deo et morere', and he replies, 'quasi una de stultis locuta es si bona suscepimus de manu Domini quare mala non suscipiamus'.<sup>38</sup> She offers a little more provocation here, then, calling Job a 'beste', and taunting him with the uselessness of his famed 'pacience', but Job sounds only a fraction more ill-tempered. It is God's reaction, non-existent in the Bible, that is significant. The theophany creates a clear censure and piece of moral guidance: it shows God's disapproval of Job speaking harshly to his wife, even under strong provocation. This seems to have less to do with the theme of patience, and more to do with proper behaviour in marriage. The poet's apparent viewpoint is in step with the medieval sermons on marriage discussed by Rüdiger Schnell, which were at pains to dissuade husbands from treating wives cruelly; by incorporating exemplary messages about marriage into a biblical story, it also has something in common with the Auchinleck *Life of Adam and Eve*.<sup>39</sup> And it may be an indicator that the poem's moral messages were tailored for an audience that included married men.

The *Life of Job*, then, is a mixture of the biblical and the legendary, excising sections of the Vulgate text, and incorporating orthodox commentary, moral direction and apparent narrative innovation, all

38 Douay-Rheims: 'Dost thou still continue in thy simplicity? Bless God and die!'; 'Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women: If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?'

39 Rüdiger Schnell, 'The Discourse on Marriage in the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 73 (1998), 771–86. *The Apocryphal Lives of Adam and Eve*, ed. Brian Murdoch and J. A. Tasioulas (Exeter, 2002): see also Cathy Hume, 'The Auchinleck *Adam and Eve*: An Exemplary Family Story', in *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives*, ed. Susanna Fein (York, 2016), 36–51.

wrapped up in aureate rhyme royal. As such, the poet seems to be taking the old-fashioned, free approach to biblical adaptation adopted by versifying friars and complained about by Wycliffite writers. One objected that 'pei docken Goddis word, and tateren it bi þer rimes'; alternatively, as the *Lanterne of Lizt* put it, such 'poyses' attach 'falsehed to þe troupe wiþ miche ungroundid mater'.<sup>40</sup> In order to understand whether the *Life of Job* functions as this kind of poem, or aligns itself with the translation project represented by the Wycliffite Bible, we now need to turn to its glosses.

## II

The Latin Vulgate glosses that sit alongside *The Life of Job's* English stanzas are what make it so unusual. I have demonstrated that it is a poetic adaptation; but it is also accompanied by a clear and careful demonstration of how much of it is a close translation of the Bible. The first stanza and its glosses provide a representative example. The Middle English reads as follows:

Most mercifull Lorde, by Thyne habundant goodnesse,  
 This rightfull man Iob, with grete hospitalite  
 Of men and women, ever kept in perfite holynesse,  
 Multiplied with riches, indued with liberalite.  
 Thre thousand camelis, vii thousand shepe had he,  
 A thousand oxen in his habitacion,  
 An hundred assis, as the bible makyth mension. (1–7)

This is based on Chapter 1, verses 1–3 of the Vulgate:

Vir erat in terra Hus nomine Iob, et erat vir ille simplex et rectus ac  
 timens Deum et recedens a malo. Natique sunt ei septem filii et tres

<sup>40</sup> The first quotation comes from 'Seven Werkys of Mercy Gostly', from Cambridge, University Library MS Ii. 6. 43, quoted in Morey, *Book and Verse*, 12; it is edited in John Wyclif, *Select English Works*, ed. Thomas Arnold, 3 vols (Oxford, 1869–71), 3: 180. *Lanterne of Lizt*, ed. Lilian M. Swinburn, EETS o.s. 151 (London, 1917), 55. On literal translation of the Bible, see the 'Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible', extracted in *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, ed. Anne Hudson (Cambridge, 1978), 67–72.

filiae. Et fuit possessio eius septem milia ovium et tria milia camelorum, quingenta quoque iuga boum et quingentae asinae ac familia multa nimis: eratque vir ille magnus inter omnes Orientales.

(There was a man in the land of Hus, whose name was Job, and that man was simple, and upright, and fearing God, and avoiding evil. And there were born to him seven sons and three daughters. And his possession was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a family exceedingly great: and this man was great among all the people of the east.)

The marginal gloss reads:

Vir erat in terra eius nomen Jobe et erat vir ille rectus. erat vir ille magnus. Possessio eiu[s] septem milia ovium tria milia kamelorum quinquaginta igua bovm quingenta asine.<sup>41</sup>

All the words in the gloss come from the Bible, but the parts that are omitted in the poem are also omitted from the gloss. The poem does not say that Job is god-fearing or simple, so the gloss simply reads that he is 'rectus'. And because the poem rearranges, the gloss is also rearranged: 'erat vir ille magnus' appears next to the middle of the stanza where Job's 'richesse' and 'hospitalite' are described, rather than after his possessions are listed, as in the Vulgate. Similarly, since his children are not mentioned until the poem's second stanza – where we are told that 'vii sonnes and thre dowghters by his wyfe also / Trewly begoten had this holy man' (8–9) – the relevant words from the Vulgate appear against that stanza. Almost all of the glosses work like this, carefully matching the poem to the corresponding parts of the Vulgate.

There are a few exceptions. One is a gloss that quotes Gregory, mentioned above, 'De nullo dona dei superbio qui sumptus ex pulvere in pulverem me reddere cognosco', which appears next to lines 141–7. Another appears alongside lines 134–6: 'Omnino alcior est diabolic in natura. Maior est vincenci homini Gloria.' Garmonsway and Raymo noted that it was not from the Vulgate and I have not been able to trace it. In two further instances, additional words are added to a Vulgate

41 The glosses were transcribed at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and I am grateful to the librarians for their assistance.

gloss, giving the impression that minor innovations in the poem are authorized by the Vulgate. I have already mentioned that the poem has Job pray to God where he does not do so in the Bible, at lines 55, 73, and 77. The gloss alongside lines 51–3, where he ‘thankith God’, similarly adds to Job verses 1.22 and 2.10 the phrase ‘sed oravit’. Next to the penultimate stanza of the poem, the gloss adds the phrase ‘post flagella’ to its quotations from Job 42.16: I noted above that the poem uses the word ‘scerge’ elsewhere to refer to Job’s trials of patience.<sup>42</sup> There is also one instance of a gloss being provided that comes from the Vulgate but does not match the poem. The gloss ‘auditu auris audiui te nunc oculus meus videt te’ (‘With the hearing of the ear I have heard thee but now my eye seeth thee’, Job 42.5) does not correspond to the English lines it appears alongside:

This blessid man Iob thankyd God of His excellence  
 That yt pleasid His incomprehensible deite  
 So to indwe hym with the spyrite of rescitence. (141–3)

However, these few instances are the exceptions. For the most part, the glosses show how each detail of the *Life of Job* is authorized by the Vulgate.

This can be contrasted with the much freer adaptation in the *Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament*, probably c. 1380. There, the opening of the Book of Job reads as follows:

Job was a full gentyll Jew,  
 of hym is helfull forto here.  
 For whoso his condicions knew  
 of meknes myght fynd maters sere.  
 Ever in his trewth he was full trew,  
 os men may in his lyfyng lere.  
 He lyfed ever als a lele Ebrew,  
 in the land of us he had no pere.  
 All yf he ware to know  
 full mekyll in erthly myght,  
 In hert he was full law

42 One more minor addition is that the gloss adds, in superscript, ‘et malefic’ above the wife’s injunction ‘Benedic deo’, to give the conventional interpretation that her literal words are a euphemistic way of saying ‘curse’.

and dred God day and nyght.

He honerd God in all degré  
 and ever was dredand to do yll.  
 Fro foyles was he freke to flee  
 and fayn all frenchep to fulfyll.  
 He had a wyfe both fayr and free  
 that redy was to werke his wyll,  
 And sevyng suns semly to se  
 and doyghturs thre full stabyll and styll.  
 Of gold God had hym sent  
 to mend with mony a store,  
 Rych robys, and ryall rent.  
 Myrth myght no man have more.

He had hymself sevyng thowsand schepe  
 in flokkes to flytt both to and fro,  
 Thre thowsand camels forto kepe,  
 and fyve hunderth asses also.  
 He had in hyllys and daylys depe  
 fyfty yoke of oxyn in ylkon two  
 And servantes wele to wake and slepe  
 in dyverse werkes with them to go.  
 For plowes he had plenté  
 his land to dele and dyght.  
 In all the Est cuntré  
 was non so mekyll of myght.<sup>43</sup>

This poet takes the relaxed attitude to adapting the Bible that characterized much earlier Middle English biblical poetry.<sup>44</sup> The poem freely amends the number of oxen Job had, makes various claims without Scriptural authority about his family, and adds similarly unauthorized details about Job's household and the surrounding landscape. These are not distinguished in any way from details that have scriptural authority. *The Life of Job* makes far fewer additions of this kind, and the presence of the gloss normally makes it easy to see where it is doing so.

43 *The Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament*, ed. Michael Livingston (Kalamazoo, 2011), lines 14089–124.

44 See Lawton, 'Englishing the Bible.'



The relationship between the glosses and the poem tends to suggest that the glosses were written by the poet. The few instances where the glosses do not come from the Vulgate show that both poem and glosses are drawing on Gregory, and that both think of Job as praying and his trials as scourges. But, crucially, these shared influences or habits of mind mostly affect poem and gloss independently. The Gregorian gloss does not appear next to the Gregorian material in the poem; neither does 'flagella' match the places where 'scerge' appears in English. And the divergent glosses alongside lines 134–6 and 141–3 also imply a more thoughtful, creative process than a simple matching exercise. This suggests that they are joint products of the same creative intelligence, rather than that the gloss was written by a scribe carefully matching a poem to the Vulgate. Moreover, it seems likely that the glossator's detailed knowledge of how the poem corresponds to the Vulgate came from having written the poem with the Book of Job open before him, as his aureate word choices also suggest. For example, in the Vulgate, and the gloss, Satan 'perambulavi' the Earth (1.7); in the English poem, he runs around it 'in his perambulacion' (30). And when Job's wife demands 'Yet in thi simplicité / Thou here arte permanent?' (93–4), 'arte permanent' is a version of 'permanes' in Job 2.9 (rendered as 'perma' in the gloss).<sup>45</sup>

In effect, the glosses demonstrate that the poem is a direct translation of scripture, rather than a loose adaptation, commentary or meditation. As such, they seem to draw attention to an act of forbidden – or at least risky – biblical translation. But is this how they would have been understood by a late fifteenth-century reader? To begin to answer this question we need to know more about contemporary practices of glossing, and authorizations of biblical translation. Earlier biblical poems, such as *Cursor Mundi*, had shown little concern for how much of their material came from the Bible, and where. Sources usually went unnamed and glosses citing authorities or quoting the Vulgate are almost unknown before the fifteenth century. There are no glosses in the Vernon manuscript, or accompanying late fourteenth-century poems such as *Susannah* or *Patience*, or earlier ones such as *Genesis and Exodus*

45 The Wycliffite versions are (Early Version) 'I haue enuyround the erthe, and thur3 gon it' and (Later Version) 'Y have cumpassid the erthe, and Y haue walkid thorou3 it'; (EV) '3it forstothé thou abidist stille in this symplete' and (LV) 'Dwellist thou yit in thi symplenesse?'

or *Jacob and Joseph*.<sup>46</sup> Glosses to biblical poems continue to be unusual in the fifteenth century, but perhaps for different reasons.

Alastair Minnis's 2003 essay 'Absent Glosses' remarked on the rarity of glossed Middle English texts, while listing a few examples: the apparently authorial glosses to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, the mid-fifteenth-century *Court of Sapience*, and Walton's 1410 translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Minnis suggests that there might be two main reasons for the rarity of these glosses: first, that there was not a wealthy enough reading community in late medieval England to 'want them and pay for them', and second, that the legacy of Arundel's Constitutions suppressed vernacular scholarship. As a result, he suggests that glosses to Middle English texts, which looked like scholarly tools for lay readers, 'would have been viewed with deep suspicion'.<sup>47</sup> This suspicion would have arisen because the idea of providing scholarly tools for readers of English texts had its roots in Wycliffite tradition. Even though Wycliffites were uneasy with some forms of biblical glossing, which they associated with friars, glosses that helped the reader to distinguish the text of the Bible from that of other, lesser authorities and from contemporary commentary were characteristically Wycliffite.<sup>48</sup> As Kantik Ghosh has argued, these reflected the view that the words of scripture had special hermeneutic status.<sup>49</sup> But, gradually and perhaps less whole-heartedly, other kinds of Middle English biblical literature came to adopt this approach of showing how their vernacular material relates to its scriptural source, either through glosses or by other means.

It is worth comparing a few examples of this literature with the *Life of Job*. First, the author of *The Stanzaic Life of Christ* (perhaps written

46 *The Vernon Manuscript: a facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. poet. a.1*, ed. A. I. Doyle (Cambridge, 1987); *Susannah*, ed. Alice Miskimin (New Haven, 1969); *Pearl, Cleanness, Patience and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, reproduced in facsimile*, ed. Israel Gollancz, EETS o.s. 162 (London, 1923); *The Middle English Genesis and Exodus*, ed. Olof Arngart (Lund, 1968); *Jacob and Iosep: A Middle English Poem of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Arthur S. Napier (Oxford, 1916).

47 Minnis, 'Absent Glosses', 5 and 9.

48 On Wycliffite approaches to glossing, see Dove, *First English Bible*, 152–72.

49 See Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts* (Cambridge, 2002), 149–51. Ghosh gives the example of the Lollard revision of Rolle's Commentary on the Psalter, where the Latin biblical text is carefully distinguished from both English translation and commentary (151).

around the turn of the fifteenth century) explains that he is writing for a man who wants to know about Christ 'by good Auctorite' and that he will be 'fully rehersynge' the 'Aucteres' 'on the whiche I founde my lessoun'.<sup>50</sup> This turns out to mean a series of Latin headings and marginal glosses referring to the Bible and other authorities: the first is to 'Petrus in Historiis Scolasticis', soon followed by references to 'Matheus in evangelio', 'Lucas', 'Genesis ultimo', 'Eutropius', 'Frater Bartholomeus', and so on. The references are not very specific: they are to books or writers rather than chapter numbers or quotations, but the promise to name authorities is kept.

*The Mirror of Our Lady*, written c. 1450 for the Bridgettine nuns of Syon abbey, is notable for its explicit mention of Arundel's strict licensing of biblical translation:

For as moche as yt is forboden vnder payne of cursynge, that no man shulde haue ne drawe eny texte of holy scrypture in to englysshe wythout lycense of the bysshop dyocesan. And in dyuerse places of youre seruyce ar suche textes of holy scrypture; therfore I asked & haue lysence of oure bysshop.<sup>51</sup>

It accompanies this punctiliousness with a concern to distinguish three kinds of content through three different scripts: the Latin of the liturgy (not always, but frequently, scriptural) that it reproduces; its direct English translation; and its exposition. The author explains that he is concerned to maintain the distinction between the last two categories so that 'by this dyfference ye may knowe which ys the bare englysshe of the latyn, and whyche ys putte therto for to expounde yt'.<sup>52</sup>

Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, c. 1410, is, of course, the best known fifteenth-century text that retells a biblical narrative. Like the author of the *Stanzaic Life of Christ*, Love cites authorities – even when these were not named in his Latin source. These appear as marginal glosses: sometimes referring to the Bible (Paul is

50 *A Stanzaic Life of Christ*, ed. Frances A. Foster, EETS o.s. 166 (London, 1926), lines 15 and 20. As David Mills notes, Foster's dating of the text to the fourteenth century is based on erroneous assumptions. See *Recycling the Cycle: the City of Chester and its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto, 1998), 46.

51 *The Myroure of Oure Ladye*, ed. John Henry Blunt, EETS e.s. 19 (London, 1873), 71.

52 *Myroure of Oure Ladye*, 70.

named in the prologue, and chapters of Matthew, Mark and Luke cited in chapter 30), but more frequently to authorities such as Augustine, Bernard and Gregory. Moreover, in the best manuscript, Cambridge University Library MS Additional 6578, quotations from the Bible are underlined – represented in italics in Michael Sargent's edition – and thereby distinguished from interpretation and expansion, a similar method to that used by the *Mirror of Our Lady*. Here, for example, is part of Love's *Mirror*'s account of the Annunciation:

Marie þan heryng þis message, & þis new gretynge, þat she neuere herd before was astoned & abashed & noȝt answered, *bot þouȝt what þis gretynge myȝt be*. Sche was not abasched or disturblet by any viciouse or synful disturblyng nor agast of his presence, for she was wont to angeles presence & to þe siȝt of hem, bot as þe gospel seiþ, *She was astoned in his worde*, þat was a new gretynge.<sup>53</sup>

Love's hermeneutics of Scripture are conservative rather than Wycliffite: for him, authority belongs to the church and therefore the need to give the biblical text a privileged, sacral status and distinguish it absolutely from that of other writings is less pressing. As Ghosh argues, he is correspondingly less careful to make the distinction than were Lollard writers. But as he also shows, Love nonetheless accommodates himself to a new norm of clearer attribution and distinction between different sources.<sup>54</sup>

All three texts, then, share with the *Life of Job* a close interest in how their text relates to the Bible, and all find ways to represent that on the page. However, they differ from the *Life of Job* both in the precise means by which they achieve this – none of the others is a Middle English poem surrounded by marginal Latin Vulgate quotations – and in their opening authorizations. Love and the author of the *Mirror of Our Lady* have obtained the episcopal licences that give them permission to translate the Bible into the vernacular; the *Stanzaic Life of Christ* author, whose text perhaps predates Arundel's Constitutions, nevertheless explains his writing process, its orthodox nature and appropriate audience. The *Life of Job* has no opening prologue, paratextual material, named author or patron to justify its act of vernacular translation. Nevertheless, the glosses clearly demonstrate that the *Life of Job* is, in effect, a translation.

53 Love, *Mirror*, 23. Italics as in the edition.

54 Ghosh, *Wycliffite Heresy*, 148–72.

Rather than weaving freely and unselfconsciously in and out of the Bible like earlier biblical poetry, it is a careful and conscious adaptation, probably produced with the Bible text at hand.

It might be argued that Arundel's Constitutions had receded so far into history by the third quarter of the fifteenth century that a biblical translation no longer needed to be justified. The Lollard panic had died down.<sup>55</sup> Kathryn Kerby-Fulton has argued that the Constitutions had limited impact, partly because of the difficulty of effective censorship in a manuscript culture, and that 'very, very little non-Wycliffite vernacular literature did incur any official suspicion under the legislation'.<sup>56</sup> And the theoretically banned Wycliffite Bible was in fact circulating so widely that Ralph Hanna has described it as a 'huge success'.<sup>57</sup>

However, there is plenty of evidence of continuing nervousness in relation to biblical translations in the middle years of the fifteenth century. Lollards did continue to live, and meet, in London, and an enquiry into heresy was launched there around 1470.<sup>58</sup> Hanna presents evidence of a Wycliffite Bible being examined for orthodoxy there in the 1460s, which shows that the acquisition of such an item remained controversial.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, in his history of the Bible, De Hamel describes Wycliffite bibles that were probably in private hands for the greater part of the fifteenth century, but in which no family names were written until after the Reformation.<sup>60</sup> As Dove puts it, 'few people ... could feel confident about owning scripture in English,' and surely, as she says, 'the common opinion' must have been that scriptural translation was forbidden.<sup>61</sup> I also share Watson's view that fifteenth-century religious

55 Richard Rex, *The Lollards* (Basingstoke, 2002), 88.

56 Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, 2006), 3 and, especially, Appendix A, 'Arundel's Constitutions of 1407–9 and Vernacular Writing'; see also Fiona Somerset, 'Professionalizing Translation at the Turn of the Fifteenth Century: Ullerston's *Determinacio*, Arundel's *Constituiones*', in *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*, ed. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (University Park, PA, 2003), 145–57.

57 Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300–1380* (Cambridge, 2005), 310.

58 Rex, *Lollards*, 91.

59 Hanna, *London Literature*, 308–10.

60 Christopher De Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible* (London, 2001), 189.

61 Dove, *First English Bible*, 67.

writing in English is more widely marked by anxiety and caution.<sup>62</sup> This was manifested in a variety of ways: Vincent Gillespie discusses defensive strategies including naming powerful patrons or impeccably orthodox authors (which *The Life of Job* does not supply), and the citation of textual authorities (which is achieved here through glossing).<sup>63</sup> The tightly controlling language of *The Life of Job* is another strategy.

This dimension of the poem might be associated with the orthodox culture of learned rectors in London from the 1430s onwards, which Sheila Lindenbaum has discussed. There is no incontrovertible evidence that the *Life of Job* was written in London, or of its exact date, but composition in London between the 1430s and 1470s is the most plausible hypothesis. Lindenbaum describes an influx of learned priests into London's parish churches, determined to follow a programme of orthodox reform. Their theology was oriented towards the patristic rather than the affective, and their strategy was to prioritize moral teaching, and to avoid speculation or engaging the laity with anything too intellectual. These priests were associated with the city's mercantile elite and were highly literate, often writers of poetry, but seem to have been relatively disinclined to circulate their work, preferring to teach by word of mouth.<sup>64</sup> It seems possible that one of them might have written *The Life of Job*: it is wholeheartedly orthodox, moral rather than affective, disinclined to speculation and intellectual content, as its controlling language demonstrates; and supportive of social hierarchies. But the conservative voice of *The Life of Job* sits alongside glosses that show that it is a *de facto* biblical translation.

The author, however, probably did not think of his text in these terms. Either his subject matter or his poetic form, or both, might have inclined him to a different conception of his project and its glossing. I mentioned above that the popularity of the Job story in the fifteenth century came principally from the Office of the Dead, which inspired the *Pety Job* and associated texts. Despite the nervousness of the author of *The Mirror of Our Lady*, translation of scriptural passages from the liturgy seems

62 Watson, 'A Clerke Schulde Have It of Kinde', especially 585–9.

63 Gillespie, 'Fatherless Books: Authorship, Attribution, and Orthodoxy in Later Medieval England', in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ: Exploring the Middle English Tradition*, ed. Ian Johnson and Allan F. Westphall, *Medieval Church Studies* 24 (Turnhout, 2013), 151–85.

64 Lindenbaum, 'London after Arundel: Learned Rectors and the Strategies of Orthodox Reform', in *After Arundel*, ed. Gillespie and Ghosh, 187–208.

never to have been as controversial as that of other parts of the Bible. The Psalter was repeatedly translated into Middle English: there are three complete versions, one in verse and two in prose, and various English versions of the penitential psalms, gradual psalms, abbreviated Psalter versions and individual psalms.<sup>65</sup> And, as Shannon Gayk has shown, psalms continued to be translated, paraphrased and commented upon after the Arundel legislation, apparently considered exempt.<sup>66</sup> These texts nevertheless often present themselves as translations in one or more ways: by giving the Latin of the psalm followed by an English translation, and then an exposition, as in Rolle's psalm commentaries; by giving a short Latin heading before each English stanza, as in Maidstone's *Penitential Psalms*; or by advertising the poem's status as English translation in a manuscript note, as with Lydgate's versions of individual psalms, for which one headnote, in Oxford, Bodleian MS Ashmole 59, reads: 'nowe folowethe the salme of Deus in nomine tuo translated owte of latyne in to englysshe by Lydegate daun Iohan'.<sup>67</sup>

The Book of Job shared some of the liturgical character of the Psalter. There are three English *Pety Jobs*, all dating from the fifteenth century: one in prose, which appears in the Wheatley manuscript; the Digby *Pety Job*, in verse, based on the prose text; and a second verse version found in five manuscripts.<sup>68</sup> All are expansions of the Nine Lessons from Job that appear in the Office of the Dead, and in each Latin and English appear together. The Latin from that Office is used as headings for English prose passages (in Wheatley) or stanzas of poetry, which begin by translating the Latin and then elaborating more freely upon it. For

65 Morey, *Book and Verse*, 173.

66 Shannon Gayk, "'Among Psalms to Fynde a Cleer Sentence': John Lydgate, Eleanor Hull, and the Art of Vernacular Exegesis," *New Medieval Literatures* 10 (2008), 161–89 (164). Dove also discusses a Wycliffite English Bible where full Latin and English texts of the Psalter appear in parallel, presumably to facilitate reading along in English in church: *First English Bible*, 63.

67 Richard Rolle, *Penitential Psalms*, ed. Geraldine Hodgson (London, 1928), and *Psalter or Psalms of David and certain Canticles*, ed. H. R. Bramley (Oxford, 1884); Richard Maidstone, *Penitential Psalms*, ed. Valerie Edden (Heidelberg, 1990); John Lydgate, 'Deus in nomine tuo saluum me fac', in *Minor Poems*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS e.s. 107 (London, 1911), 10–12.

68 See, respectively, 'Lessons from the Dirige' in *The Wheatley Manuscript*, ed. Mabel Day, EETS o.s. 155 (London, 1921), 59–64; *Twenty-six Political and Other Poems*, ed. J. Kail, EETS o.s. 124 (London, 1904), 120–43; Fein, *Moral Love Songs*, 289–359.

example, the *Pety Job* text in Oxford, Bodleian MS Douce 322, c. 1475, begins as follows:

Parce michi, Domine!  
 Lyef Lord, my soule Thow spare!  
 The sothe I sey now sykerly:  
 That my dayes nought they are,  
 For though I be bryght of ble –  
 The fayrest man that ys oughware –  
 Yet shall my fayernesse fade and fle,  
 And I shal be but wormes ware. (1–8)

In two of the four further manuscripts where the poem appears – Cambridge, University Library MS Ff. 2.38 and Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 1584 – the Latin is omitted.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that, as with English Psalters, the practice of presenting extracts from the Vulgate Job alongside an English adaptation was well-established in the fifteenth century.

Beyond these liturgical associations, three further aspects of the poem and its glosses may be important for defining its literary status. First, as mentioned above, its poetic form and aureate language make it absolutely clear that it is neither plain English nor literal translation. The rhyme royal stanzas draw attention to their craftedness, showing that they are not direct equivalents to the Vulgate, and distinguishing themselves as orthodox alternatives to the plain prose of the Wycliffite Bible.<sup>70</sup> The texts that sit alongside the poem in the manuscript are often pious but almost entirely non-biblical, which perhaps helps to emphasize its poetic over its biblical status. Second, while the gloss authorizes, it also points to gaps in the poem's authorization: even for non-Latin-literate readers, glancing at the glosses would make it clear that some stanzas were not based on the Vulgate. The empty margins alongside the stanzas where the physicians and minstrels visit Job, and where God scolds him, in this way function as significant visual markers, meeting the Wycliffite objection to earlier poetry that it mixed up the true and the 'ungroundid'. Third, to borrow Ian Johnson's description of the use of Latin in the *Stanzaic Life of Christ*, the glosses provide 'visual evidence

69 Fein, *Moral Love Songs*, 302–3.

70 Lawton makes this point about English biblical poetry in 'Englishing the Bible', 481. See also note XX above.



of sound translating and proper use of commentary materials.' But at the same time, they allow the poet 'to render an idiomatic version with the Latin as a safety-net'.<sup>71</sup> The *Life of Job* is not a translation that displaces its original, as the Wycliffite Bible aspires to do.<sup>72</sup> Presenting the poem accompanied by glosses from the Vulgate shows that the poem does *not* replicate the Vulgate text. Crucially, the way the glosses work support the poem's one explicit statement about its relation to the Vulgate. At the end of the first stanza of the poem, the tag 'as the bible makyth mension' (7) sets the poem apart from the Bible, presenting itself as dependent on external authorization rather than as a replacement for that authority.

I am suggesting that the glosses could have performed one function for a lay reader of English who was barely Latin literate: distinguishing the scripturally authorized from the legendary and individual material, in a way that could have been seen at a glance. However, most of the detail of the glosses could only have been appreciated by an expert reader of Latin. It seems possible, indeed, that not only were poet and glossator the same person, but that he was also the main intended reader of the gloss: that it functioned as a reminder of where he had found his material, in case he wanted to rewrite the poem, adapt it, or justify it. For, as I will now argue, the main audience of *The Life of Job* was probably not looking at the manuscript at all: the poem was written to be performed.

### III

As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the two most recent discussions of *The Life of Job* argue that it forms part of a thematically coherent anthology of texts presented together in MS HM 140. Staley proposes that it 'forms an interesting link between the works of Chaucer and Lydgate that precede it and the texts gathered in the final booklet,'

71 Ian Johnson, 'Prologue and Practice: Middle English Lives of Christ', in *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Ellis (Cambridge, 1989), 69–85 (82).

72 This formulation is based on the discussion in Ellis's introduction to *The Medieval Translator*, 1–14 (2). See also De Hamel's discussion of Oxford, Queen's College MS 369, a Wycliffite Gospel Book that ends 'here is the endynge of alle the gospelles *as thei stonden in the bible*' [italics De Hamel's], a colophon that suggests a conservative view, probably shared by many owners of Wycliffite bibles, that this English text is not itself a Bible: *Book*, 184–6.

suggesting that the manuscript as a whole would have been read sequentially, and focusing on a concept of broad political order that she sees the compiler of the anthology trying to project.<sup>73</sup> Lerer calls the manuscript 'a thematically and formally coherent assembly' based on 'ideals of faith and patience within the structures of human and divine authority'. He reads the function of *The Life of Job* as completing the 'poetic bracketing of the manuscript's first part', 'perhaps deliberately constructed to reflect the interests of the compilation's other poems', again firmly placing its reading context – and even its artistic genesis – among its manuscript neighbours.<sup>74</sup> It is true that Job represents an ideal of patience and faith, but I find it more difficult to see ideas about political order emerging from the poem, or to find ideas about patience or order meaningfully articulated in many of the short items collected in the manuscript. It seems unlikely that whoever put the manuscript together from its three originally separate parts was trying to achieve thematic coherence. It seems even less likely that anyone would have approached it in such a way – reading the whole manuscript sequentially, and paying close attention to the possible unifying themes that might emerge – as to recognize them.

Of course, none of this invalidates the idea that *The Life of Job* was written to be read on the page.<sup>75</sup> However, the poem's editors have all suggested that in its present form the poem is somehow incomplete. As mentioned earlier, MacCracken proposed that what was missing was 'scenes painted in miniature', and Garmonsway and Raymo offer some variations on this idea: that it described a tapestry, or was an emblem poem.<sup>76</sup> The problem with this approach lies in the images that the poem seems to indicate, which, Garmonsway and Raymo suggest, are Job blessing his children, the envy of the serpent Satan, the beginning of Job's persecutions, God's appearance to Job, and Job's holding of a feast. None of these images is part of the standard medieval iconographical

73 Staley, 'Huntington 140', 313; 316.

74 Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers*, 100; 111–12.

75 The poem is punctuated with mid-line virgules, in a way that seems to fit with the fifteenth-century vogue found in some Lydgate and Hoccleve manuscripts and described by George B. Killough, 'Middle English Verse Punctuation: A Sample Survey', *Text* 4 (1988), 163–88. These probably do not offer any indication of whether the poetry was intended to be read aloud or on the page.

76 MacCracken, 'Life of Holy Job', 365; Garmonsway and Raymo, 'Metrical Life', 77–8.

programme for the Book of Job, which instead presents Job's prosperity, the visit of three messengers, Satan afflicting Job with boils, Job on the dunghill, his being tormented by the devil and his wife, conversations with friends, Job's return to prosperity, and his assistance with the capture of the leviathan.<sup>77</sup>

The feast and God's appearance to Job are apparently original to this version of the Job story. A feast might work well as a pictorial image. But God's appearance to Job at this point in the narrative is, as I have shown, unusual and without apparent precedent. It seems more likely that it occurs because the poet wanted God to deliver a rebuke to Job, rather than that the speech was eccentrically devised to accompany an unprecedented image. Other details are hard to imagine as static images. The *beginning* of Job's persecution is not a visual image, and nor is the envy of the serpent. As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, Garmonsway and Raymo go on to suggest that the poet 'was writing a mumming poem', making a passing reference to Lydgate, but then object that 'it does not read much like a dramatic vehicle'.<sup>78</sup> Their misgivings are understandable, but I want to present the evidence that that is just what it is.

I propose that *The Life of Job* was written to accompany mimed action of a fairly elaborate kind. The poem is full of deictic terms – 'here', 'now', 'this' and 'these' – and a strange alternation of present and past tenses, which make more sense if they are understood as narrating actions taking place in front of a listening audience. To take an early example, the third stanza of the poem reads as follows:

Here, lo, holy Iob his children doth sanctifie,  
And techith his sonnes with-oute presumption  
To kepe theire festes, and ever God to magnifie,  
And wysely to lyve with-oute any detraccion.  
And to his doughtres, with-outen pryde or ellacion  
Of their native beaute, he bad them have respect  
Hough bright Lucyfer for his pryde from heaven was deiect. (15–21)

It begins with two deictic words, apparently directing our attention to something. The verbs in the first two lines of the stanza are in the

77 On the medieval iconography, see Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'Art Chrétien, Volume 2: Iconographie de la Bible I: Ancien Testament* (Paris, 1956), 311–18.

78 Garmonsway and Raymo, 'Metrical Life', 78.

present tense; the poet then reverts to the past tense for 'bad' (20) for the account of what Job said to his daughters. This alternation of tenses suggests a narrative that is half describing actions that are happening in the present in front of the speaker and audience, and half filling in the blanks, using the past tense that one would expect for a story about events from the distant past. The deictic terms do not, of course, have to be read as literally referring to something that is physically present: they could be symbolic references to our place in the narrative. But the number of uses in the poem – 'this' is used every few lines, in relation to Job, Satan, and Job's wife, for example – together with the repeated alternations of tense, create an overall impression that they are referring to some external, present reality.

That this external reality was acted rather than simply visual is suggested in several ways. Some of the moments highlighted with 'here' are much easier to imagine narrating a performance than accompanying an image. 'Lo, here, the envy of this serpent and devyll Sathan' (29) reads oddly as a description of an image – surely the 'lo, here' would better accompany the moment, two lines later, where Satan encounters God if that were the case. It makes much more sense if we read it as an announcement of the entrance of a spectacularly dressed and grimacing actor. There are also a number of uses of 'now', which seem slightly better suited to a time-bound performance than a static tapestry or painting: 'Nowe blessed Iob here makyth a ryall feest' (162); 'So nowe Iob is tried from all corrupcion' (135).

Narrative elements of the poem are also developed away from the scriptural source in ways that suggest a performance. To see this clearly we need to look at contemporary parallels: primarily, Lydgate's mummings. The terms 'mumming' and 'disguising' are sometimes opposed to one another, with 'disguising' suggesting a more spectacular performance, but I am less interested in fine distinctions than in placing *The Life of Job* in the context of the occasional entertainments that were put on in the fifteenth century and incorporated 'various combinations of music, spoken word, impersonation, gesture or action, and special effects', as Claire Sponsler puts it in the introduction to her edition of Lydgate's *Mummings and Entertainments*. As Sponsler observes, Lydgate's verses for these entertainments 'were apparently spoken by a presenter of some sort' and seem to have been written 'to accompany mimed action'. Most of the pieces Sponsler edits are written in rhyme royal, several involve biblical subjects or saints, and all are short and full of action. Some incorporated ritual gift-giving (the traditional

expectation of a mumming), others dancing and song. They were performed at festive and ceremonial occasions. To give three examples, the 'Mumming for the Goldsmiths of London' was performed at a Candlemas feast, and featured King David bringing gifts to the mayor of London. The 'Disguising at London', perhaps performed at Parliament, opens with a phrase that is familiar from *The Life of Job* – 'loo here' – introducing Dame Fortune. The 'Legend of St George' narrates the saint's life for a feast held by the armourers of London.<sup>79</sup>

One indication that the *Life of Job* might have been performed is its incorporation of music. As Job's trials begin in the Bible, his family is feasting (1.18), but in the poem we have a description of 'instrumentes with armony' being 'merely ... toched' (57, 59). The visit of the minstrels to Job on the dungheap, with precedent in vernacular Job traditions, was mentioned above. It also features a moment of grand gift-giving at a feast: once Job's fortunes are restored, he celebrates as follows:

Nowe blessed Iob here makyth a ryall feest  
 To his bredren and sustren and to his frendis all.  
 And everyche of theym ioyed in God, bothe most and leste,  
 And to Iob grete yftes gafe that weren aureall.  
 And by the plesaunce of God most celestially  
 Gretter hospytalite than ever he did to-fore  
 All his lyfe after kepte he ever-more. (162–8)

In the Vulgate, the gifts are gold earrings and sheep (Job 42.11); the handling here suggests a more splendid visual display. The treatment of the feast is also expanded from the Vulgate reference to bread being eaten in Job's house, and is one of a series of references to feasting in the poem, all of which are elaborated – the joyful feast at lines 57–60 with music, mentioned above, and the discussion of the moral obligation to keep feasts but avoid 'voluptuose fraylte and ydell loquacite' at lines 15–28. These references may indicate that the poem was written for performance at a feast. The final stanza, which opens with an exclamatory 'lo!' may perhaps suggest a different kind of performance: here, we are told about how 'Dethe sparith no creature of high nor lowe degre' (177) and how Job 'owte of the worlde ded wende' (178), in the context of references to a large group of people: Job's ten children, and his soul

79 John Lydgate, *Mummings and Entertainments*, ed. Claire Sponsler (Kalamazoo, 2010), 7–9. For the 'Disguising at London', see 21–9.

resting with 'patriarkes and prophetes all' (181). I wonder whether we should envisage a performance of the Dance of Death, of the kind painted at St Paul's churchyard (and described by Lydgate) and enacted in other European cities.<sup>80</sup>

The occasion for such a performance might plausibly have been a guild feast, and again, several of the poem's features make more sense in a guild context. The core activities of parish guilds – of which there were up to 200 in late medieval London – included the provision of prayers for the souls of dead guild members; assistance for living members who fell into poverty or sickness; mutual assistance in worldly business, and dispute resolution.<sup>81</sup> Guilds' annual feasts were important events – Gervase Rosser goes so far as to call feasts the 'defining activities of the guilds'.<sup>82</sup> Members were obliged to attend and they were major ceremonial occasions, combining the jovial and the spiritual. They seem often to have involved some kind of procession, performance, poem, or sermon. Rosser, for example, describes a Beverley guild presenting the story of St Helen's discovery of the True Cross as part of a dramatic procession, and an Abingdon guild hearing a poem about a bridge they had sponsored.<sup>83</sup> Gareth Griffith has argued that the verse Life of St Katherine in Longleat MS 55 was written for performance by multiple readers for the Guild of Bath, and would have included audience participation.<sup>84</sup> Three of Lydgate's mummings are known to have been performed for guilds,

80 John Lydgate, *Dance of Death*, eds Florence Warren and Beatrice White, EETS o.s. 181 (London: 1931): for the fifteenth-century performances in Besançon and Bruges, see Introduction, x.

81 Caroline Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society: Essays in Honour of F. R. H. Du Boulay*, ed. Caroline Barron and Christine Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, 1985), 13–37; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–c. 1580*, 2nd edn (New Haven, 2005), 142–4; Gervase Rosser, 'Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages', in *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350–1750*, ed. S. J. Wright (London, 1988), 29–55.

82 Rosser, 'Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England', *Journal of British Studies* 33: 4 (October, 1994), 430–46 (431).

83 Rosser, 'Communities of Parish and Guild', 43–4; 'Going to the Fraternity Feast', 445.

84 'King Arthur and St. Katherine Working for the City of Bath: Reinterpreting Longleat MS 55', unpublished paper.

presumably at their feasts: as well as those mentioned above, there was a Christmas mumming for the mercers of London.<sup>85</sup>

In addition to its articulation of the importance of feasting, and appropriate combination of the pious and the jovial, *The Life of Job* places emphasis on prayer – discussed earlier – and on mutual assistance in times of hardship. When Job's friends visit him on the dunghill because they have heard of his 'trouble', we are told, in various additions to the Vulgate text, that they are acting 'of grete generosite', that they are moved by their 'love pure' for him, and that they offer 'councell' as well as the (scriptural) comfort (106–9). There may be an intentional parallel with the informal visits that guild members made to their brothers and sisters in times of sickness.<sup>86</sup> Job's injunction to his sons to live 'with-oute any detraccion' (18), another addition to the Bible, may have a connection with the guilds' interest in promoting peace between members.<sup>87</sup> More broadly, an enactment of the life of Job might be appropriate to an organization whose roots are in the celebration of the Office of the Dead; and the significant female membership of most guilds puts the poem's unusual disapproval of Job's harsh words to his wife in an interesting light.<sup>88</sup>

Sponsler's 2004 essay 'Drama in the Archives: Recognizing Medieval Plays' argued that it is difficult to know a medieval play when we see one: that stage directions may be absent, along with any indication of speakers, making play texts virtually indistinguishable from poems designed for private reading. Moreover, she suggests that the boundaries between plays and poems may be blurred in a performative culture where narratives are often read aloud. The evidence that *The Life of Job* was originally written for performance is not conclusive, and in the absence of an introductory rubric of the kind that Shirley wrote when he copied Lydgate's mummings, we cannot be sure. However, I present this consideration of the performative qualities of *The Life of Job* partly as a response to Sponsler's invitation to other scholars to recover more medieval dramatic texts.<sup>89</sup>

85 Lydgate, *Mummings and Entertainments*, 103.

86 Barron, 'Parish Fraternities', 26–7.

87 Barron, 'Parish Fraternities', 25, and Rosser, 'Communities of Parish and Guild', 37, discuss the role of guilds as forums for the resolution of disputes.

88 On women in guilds, see Barron, 'Parish Fraternities', 30–2.

89 Claire Sponsler, 'Drama in the Archives: Recognizing Medieval Plays', in *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England*, ed. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (Basingstoke, 2004), 111–30.

Considering the possibility that *The Life of Job* was a play also offers us new ways of thinking about its glosses, and about how it was authorized as a piece of biblical translation. First, if we can place it alongside the biblical drama performed in York, Chester and elsewhere in the fifteenth century, it becomes part of what was a large and a thriving genre at this period, as noted by Watson in 1995 and re-emphasized by his critics. Such drama, of course, flourished under the supervision of the civic and religious authorities: in the case of York, the existence of the register of c. 1470 shows that the text of the plays was being officially recorded, and by the sixteenth century performances were being checked against the text.<sup>90</sup> In the case of *The Life of Job*, which I suggest we imagine being read aloud to accompany performance, we might more helpfully think of the text as being authorized by its reader, or presenter. This presenter might have been the poet – as seems to have been the case with some of Lydgate's mummings.<sup>91</sup> I have argued that the poet had clerical training; if he also presented the poem this would, of course, allow him to lend the text the authority of the church. The glosses may, in this context, have been intended mainly for the presenter's eyes; it is also worth considering the possibility that they would have been copied onto placards or stage sets. A parallel can be found in Lydgate's description of the entry of Henry VI's triumphal entry into London, which includes his transcription (into the margin of his poem) of Vulgate verses, called 'scriptures', which were painted on pageants.<sup>92</sup>

I am proposing that the original audience of *The Life of Job* experienced it as a performance, presented by someone who carried with him the authority of the church. In these festive circumstances the question of whether *The Life of Job* fell under the scope of Arundel's Constitutions is unlikely to have arisen. Later, though, the poem may have been read on the page alongside Lydgate and Chaucer for many years, its original dramatic purpose forgotten. The literary status of *The Life of Job* is hard to determine precisely because it was not fixed, but must have been perceived differently at different historical moments, in different performative contexts, and depending on readers' or listeners' religious and political perspectives. Nevertheless, I hope to have presented an

90 *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the York Corpus Christi Play as recorded in British Library Additional MS 35290*, ed. Richard Beadle, 2 vols, EETS s.s. 23 & 24 (Oxford, 2009 & 2013), Introduction, xi–xxii.

91 Lydgate, *Mummings and Entertainments*, 7–8.

92 Lydgate, *Mummings and Entertainments*.



example of how the authorization of vernacular biblical literature in fifteenth-century England could be achieved without an episcopal licence. While contemporary texts rely on naming powerful patrons or famous poets, *The Life of Job* was authorized in performance by its presenter, and on the page by its ornate poetic form and glosses, which show that it was adapted with meticulous care from the Bible, but could never take its place.